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Air Attaché Here for 5 Years

Col. Stig Wennerstrom Goes on Trial In Stockholm for Gross Espionage

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The Washington Post Foreign Service

STOCKHOLM, April 9—Colonel Stig Wennerstrom, confessed spy for the Soviet Union during a 14½-year period which included five years as Swedish air attaché in Washington, came to trial today for gross espionage.

So sensitive are the details of Wennerstrom's alleged "grave injury to the national defense" that the district court went into closed session after an opening ceremony lasting only one minute. Wennerstrom is alleged to have betrayed secrets about American weapons sold to Sweden, as well as other information.

The dapper, white-haired Wennerstrom, 57, has been held for 9½ months. He bowed stiffly to Judge Ingvar Agren

and the professional jury of four men and five women.

Never in Swedish history has an espionage case caused so much concern. Prosecution sources have compared it in gravity to the most damaging spy cases in the West after World War II. It has necessitated wholesale revision of

Swedish defense arrangements.

A parliamentary commission is now investigating charges that the Social Democratic government of Prime Minister Tage Erlander was negligent in handling the case after Wennerstrom first came under suspicion in 1959. Erlander was not personally informed until Wennerstrom was arrested last June 20.

Wennerstrom is being tried on a three-count indictment covering his service as air attaché in Moscow from 1949 to 1952, as air attaché in Washington from 1952 to 1957, as a member of the joint services staff in Stockholm and later as a Foreign Office disarmament expert from 1957 to 1963.

The trial is expected to last up to four weeks. Conviction can carry a penalty of life imprisonment.

Prosecutor Werner Rhynning has charged that Wennerstrom was paid \$120,000 by the Soviet Union, an average yearly amount slightly in excess of Wennerstrom's \$8000 salary.

Wennerstrom has never confirmed an exact figure, however, and the amount is only an estimate. The money is

thought to have been deposited in Swiss banks.

Supposedly Wennerstrom photographed important documents and delivered the microfilm in tiny containers to Soviet representatives during handshakes at cocktail parties.

Stockholm newspapers also have published charges that he acted briefly as a double agent collecting information for the United States. The American embassy prepared a later categorical denial but the Swedish Foreign Office has remained mute on the allegation.

Prosecution sources say that Wennerstrom has acknowledged receiving \$1200 from American sources for data relayed at social gatherings in Washington. This acknowledgement reportedly was volunteered and surprised security police.

Contrary to some expectations, the indictment does not charge Wennerstrom with espionage directed against any foreign country, perhaps because espionage against Swedish interests is considered a more serious offense.

Nevertheless, Swedish officials reflect concern over the damage done to their relations with the Pentagon. Many American weapons were sold for cash to neutral but Western-oriented Sweden on condition that secret details be scrupulously safeguarded.

Attempted Suicide

During his imprisonment Wennerstrom has been alternatively cooperative and re-

calcitrant in questioning, sometimes telling contradictory stories. Last October he attempted to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping pills.

Speculation has been rife concerning Wennerstrom's motives. At one point, he asserted that as a Socialist he always had been ideologically sympathetic to the Soviet Union although he objected to certain aspects of Soviet policy.

But few authorities here appear to believe this or the explanation that Wennerstrom was influenced primarily by money.

Men who knew him well think that he had a sort of Walter Mitty complex in a wish to be considered important.

While in Washington, where he was active on the cocktail circuit, Wennerstrom attracted attention when one of his two daughters eloped with a congressional page. Both daughters are now married to Swedes.

Erlander does not appear to have been badly hurt politically by the spy case, although the fact that he did not know about it is in some ways comparable to the situation of former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan in the Profumo affair.

But the case has had a profound effect in blasting the "it can't happen here" complex. Swedish security has been markedly tightened as a consequence.